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...E GREATNESS AND DECLINE OF VENICE.

A PRIZE ESSAY,

READ IN THE THEATRE, OXFORD,

JUNE 16th, 1858.

BY

LEWIS MORRIS, B.A.,

JESUS COLLEGE.



OXFORD:
T. AND G. SHRIMPTON.
M DCCC LVIII.




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ANALYSIS.

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THE

GREATNESS AND DECLINE OF VENICE[a].

FEW educated men are not familiar with at least the most striking features of that long and splendid pageant which is known to us as the "History of Rome." The simple fables which are so closely interwoven with the dawning narrative,—the stories of the twin-brothers and their mysterious foster-mother,—of the good King Servius and the wicked Tullia,—of the proud Tarquin and the chaste Lucretia,—of the Horatii and their bloody duel,—of Curtius and his magnificent self-sacrifice,—of Cincinnatus and his grand simplicity; these and many others, coming as they do much nearer to us than the stories of Arthur, or Alfred, or Cœur-de-Lion, impress themselves upon our minds with a vividness and reality which no frigid rationalism can ever completely efface. Later studies bring out with distinctness the rising fortunes of the Commonwealth to the full effulgence of the Empire under Augustus, and so through all the painful chronicle of its decline, until the advent of the Goths. But when the curtain has fallen upon the Western Empire, and the play is apparently played out, few care to await its rise upon that great life-drama which, during the mediæval period, was acted again upon the old classic ground. Many do not even suspect that Italy, during that most critical period, was the theatre of great events, of struggles for liberty as glorious and more obstinate than those of the *populus* and the *plebs*, of factions and proscriptions as fierce and sanguinary as those of Marius and Sylla, of tyrants as depraved and cruel as the worst of the Cæsars, of great names and large patriotism, of pure art and wide-spread commerce, all with a greater claim upon our sympathies than those of Rome, because, while she stands on the further side of that great gulf which yawns between the old order and the new, the Italian republics stand upon this side, the history of Rome is that of a vanished yesterday, the story of mediæval Italy is that of the dawn of to-day.

It is no longer, however, one story which has to be told. The

[a] This Essay is based upon Sismondi and Daru, together with occasional references to Hazlitt, Gibbon, Lord Brougham, Hallam, a lighter history by Flagg, and other articles of less importance.

broad canvass of history, before occupied by the gigantic proportions of one Titanic form, is filled with numerous groups of diminutive figures, brilliantly coloured and exquisitely finished; all with something of resemblance to the great original, whether in their beauties or their deformities. But there is no longer any great central figure, and what the picture gains in intensity of meaning, it certainly loses in simplicity, and as an artistic whole. There is altogether a want of breadth and grandeur in the history of mediæval Italy; the outlines are hardly sufficiently well marked, the confused maze of petty systems become irrecoverably entangled; their wars are as tedious and unsatisfactory as those of the Volsci and Æqui. Some well-defined figures, however, grow upon us out of the obscurity; Florence, Milan, and Rome herself, have all eventful histories: Venice in particular recalls the traditions of the past, whether by the extent of her empire, the brilliancy of her story, or her extraordinary permanence. Her story is worth telling, because it is incomparably the most romantic, and indeed, anomalous, of modern times; and because, as a whole, it bears a rough kind of resemblance to our own. It is more interesting than that of the other Italian cities, because, in addition to the charm of a direct and unbroken descent from ancient Rome, which she alone could trace, only in Venetian story is there anything like a distinct moral significance, only this conforms to the test by which all really useful history may be tried—the possession of "a beginning, a middle, and an end, a moral progress, and a mournful decline[b]." Her rise is coincident in point of time with the last agonies of the Empire. Fourteen centuries ago, the fertile plains of Upper Italy and the peaceful cities of Venetia were exposed to the first rush of savage invasion which broke in upon the weakness of Rome. Never had barbarian conquerors reaped so rich a harvest. Year after year they came, different in name, but alike in fierceness and rapacity,—Attila with his Huns, Alboin and his Lombards, Clovis and his Franks, Theodoric and his Ostrogoths; scarcely had one tribe passed away, or been absorbed, before another came to reopen the still bleeding wounds, and to turn the whole of the hapless country into one bloody battle-ground. One can picture even now, (for war is always essentially the same,) the warning signal-fires blazing out on the distant hills, the dull suspense of the succeeding days, then the smoke of burning homesteads upon the horizon, the terror always drawing nearer and nearer; at last, the dark masses of the enemy, first in the open fields, then swarming in the streets of the city, and presently the awful realities of savage warfare. And so there came a time when it seemed to the bolder spirits that these horrors were to be avoided, at what-

[b] The remark is in substance Mr. Stanley's: "Sinai and Palestine."

ever sacrifice of old associations; and they wandered forth from their homes to seek some place of security for life and labour, some little spot of dry ground for the soles of their feet, amid the wide-spread waters of barbarism. They chose, with a wise prescience, the chain of almost inaccessible Lagunes which lie at the head of the Adriatic. Each succeeding wave of invasion, (and there they were many,) which swept over the mainland, drove before it, to some of the many islets, its band of outcasts, to swell the number of those who were to form the nucleus of the future republic. There they coalesced into a number of separate communities, not bound together by any very powerful tie, often, indeed, distracted by mutual jealousies, and only combining against common perils. Thus they went on for two centuries and a half, pursuing a humble commerce, constantly at war with their enemies, or with each other, yet never losing their independence. Then there came a notable change; the citizens of each little island met together at Heraclea, and elected a Duke of maritime Venetia. From this period there existed one state only, and the results of the union must have made themselves felt in the greater security for the lives and commerce of the citizens—effects which must in their turn have given rise to a far more ambitious policy than that of mere self-defence. The fortunes of the growing state are still, however, long involved in obscurity. The mainland was in the power of heretics and enemies. The sea was infested by swarms of piratical adventurers. From the former the Venetians had little to fear. Their inaccessible position was their surest safeguard. Against the latter they soon became able to hold their ground. They were, in the quaint words of the minister of Theodoric, like water-fowl[c], and they penetrated in safety along the canals and navigable waters of Lombardy. Meanwhile their long isolation was consolidating the national character. One of the few strongholds which defied the Lombard power, they were rewarded by the Eastern Empire, to which they always seem to have looked with affection, with the honour of an equal alliance. When Charlemagne marched into Italy to receive at Rome the imperial crown, his courtiers saw with surprise the costly silks of the Venetian merchants. But the little state, undazzled by the almost fabulous glories of his career, and strong in her allegiance to Constantinople, stedfastly refused to admit his title, or that of his successors, to the Empire of the West. And in 809, when at war with Pepin, the islanders assembled their fleets, and fixing upon the island of Rialto, they built that famous city which was destined to play so brilliant a part in mediæval politics,—to blend within itself the most opposite traditions,—a maritime Sparta,—an oligarchical Athens,—a Rome, not of outcasts, but of nobles;

[c] Cassiodorus, Variar. l. xii. Epist. xxiv., quoted by Gibbon, c. 35.

to be as much loved by her citizens as she was bitterly hated by her contemporaries; a splendid paradox, a strange medley of contradictions, of noble deeds and mysterious crimes; to us the repository of priceless art-treasures, and connected inseparably with the most precious fancies of painter and poet. Thirty years afterwards they removed thither from Alexandria the body of St. Mark. It was a characteristic act. The key-note of early Venetian history is to be found in the earnest piety and strong religious feeling of the people. They felt, these poor outcasts, that life was not a frivolous pursuit of pleasure, but a real, endless struggle against overwhelming dangers. The spirit in which they lived and worked may still be discerned in the ecclesiastical monuments of this period,—pure Gothic, full of noble meaning and deep devotion,—so widely different, in its entire unconsciousness, from the oppressive egotism of the Renaissance.

Here, again, there is little to be recorded for nearly two hundred years. The Republic was slowly increasing in power, busy in the pursuit of a commerce which had by this time become very extensive, and which was destined for a still longer period to absorb her entire energies. But in 997, the small towns of Istria and Dalmatia, harassed by Slavonian pirates and forgotten by the Eastern Empire, placed themselves under the protection of Venice: with her help the pirates were vanquished, and the Doge assumed the title of Duke of Venice and Dalmatia.

A great change came over Europe, after the millenniary epoch of Christianity. There went a stir and trembling over the form of the sleeping giant of progress before he started up finally from his death-like slumber. This was the epoch of great national movements, of the successful migration of the Normans into Southern Italy, and of the commencement of the long collision of the East and the West, provoked by the fanaticism of the Crusades. Before this, the history of Europe is only that of a number of separate organizations, slowly opening into life after the long winter of the dark ages. No settled scheme, no unity or coherence of purpose, is to be discerned in the isolation of the various fragmentary parts. The force which ruled over society was centrifugal rather than centripetal. Only in the reign of Charlemagne, that marvellous anachronism, are there any traces of a dominant idea. With his death the whole fabric of empire faded away like a glorious vision. Afterwards there was an attempt at reconstruction, on principles more in accordance with the crude condition of society. The rise of feudalism was the reduction to fixed rules of the vague but indisputable right of the stronger. Meanwhile, an antagonistic development was going on in Italy. The languid circulation of the empire had abandoned the dead extremities, to gather itself into little knots or centres of

more vigorous life. And thus arose that wondrous reproduction of old forms, the municipal system of mediæval Italy, so thoroughly repugnant to that of feudalism, that it was impossible for them to exist together. Nor was it long before they were brought into collision. Before the middle of the twelfth century, the Italian cities, which had seen from behind their strong walls and deep fosses the contest of the Investitures, which had listened to the burning words of Arnold of Brescia, telling of political and religious freedom, were brought into direct contact with the imperial claims of the house of Hohenstaufen. And then began that memorable struggle which forbade the German Cæsars of the West to entertain any hope of crushing out the reviving liberty of the towns. And from the day when Frederic Barbarossa and his Germans entered Italy in 1154, to that glorious spring-day of 1196, when on the field of Legnano, the Milanese "Company of Death," invoking God and St. Ambrose, drove back the defeated invaders, and so ended the long contest of the Lombard league, Upper Italy hardly rested for a moment from the terrible struggle to which she was committed. And when the power of the Emperors decreased, that of the Papacy arose, and with pretensions not less dangerous to real liberty. Then came the interminable and envenomed contest of Guelphs and Ghibellines, all the leading states taking part in the conflict, on one side or the other; most of them, too, divided among themselves: then the Empire and the Papacy were arrayed against each other openly, the Lombard league revived, and in 1249 the chequered fortunes of the war determined by the defeat of Hensius, and the death of Frederic the Second in the succeeding year. This was a busy century for Italy. Her free cities advanced to a degree of wealth and splendour very far beyond that of the rest of Europe. Many luxuries and social refinements were familiar to the burghers of her great towns, which were long afterwards unknown to those of London or Paris. The independence which they had won at the point of the sword, the atmosphere of danger which they breathed, the constant need of vigilance and decision, forced them into an early adolescence. And this was followed by an equally early decay. Many of the less famous cities had already passed the acme of fortune: in all, the seeds of incipient decline were set. The indomitably factious spirit attaching to the political watchwords of Guelph and Ghibelline was already kindled. These words had passed through their two preceding phases, which had represented, first, the opposition of the Empire and the free cities, then that of the Empire and the Church, to assume the character of party cries, utterly unmeaning in themselves, but endowed with a strange power over those fierce Italian tempers, and able at any time to lash them into a frenzy of passion. From this furious

energy the transition was easy to a state of exhaustion and apathy, and so to a quiet surrender of their liberties into the hands of tyrants, who proved themselves in every case quite unfit to receive so sacred a trust.

Now it was to all this fierce disorder, and her own entire exemption from it, that Venice owed, at least in part, her own steady rise at this period. They were wasting their strength,—she was constantly adding to hers: commerce may be less glorious, but it is undoubtedly more profitable, than war. Her tranquillity was unbroken through all these troublous times. In the struggle of the Investitures her name never once appears. When Milan and the Lombard cities were covering themselves with glory, she preserved a cold neutrality. In the campaign which preceded the building of Alessandria she appears to have volunteered her aid, though not, perhaps, to take any very active part in the confederacy. Before the great day of Legnano she had formally withdrawn from the league. When Alexander III., the true head of the Church, fled to Venice a helpless fugitive, the strong religious feeling of the Venetians led them, in a burst of generous sympathy, to break through their settled maxims of policy, and to range themselves against the whole force of the Empire. The signal defeat sustained by Frederic on this occasion at the hands of the Venetian fleet is interesting as being the first important evidence of their naval power. It was then, too, that they obtained from the grateful Pontiff the grant of the sovereignty of the Adriatic; and it was at Venice, as a neutral state, that the Emperor and the Pope met in the spring of 1177, to attempt the reconciliation of their conflicting claims. When, under the second Frederic, the disastrous day of Corte Nuova seemed to be the death-blow of the Guelph party, Gregory IX., as its head, appealed for aid to the patriotism of the maritime states of Venice and Genoa. The latter appears to have afforded very efficient support in the defeat of the Pisans at Meloria, and so in paving the way for that strange reverse of fortune which ended in the excommunication of Frederic. But Venice, though her force was already greater than that of her rival, was by no means prominent in the struggle, and accorded probably a languid co-operation, busied as she was with her fast-increasing conquests and commerce far away in the classic lands of antiquity, or in the more remote and mysterious regions of the East. For while she appeared thus indifferent to the fortunes of Italy, she was not slow to exert the full measure of her growing power in a cause more congenial to the national temper. In the last year of the eleventh century the Venetians were able and willing to send a fleet of 200 vessels as their contribution to the first Crusade. In this they were joined by their rivals of Pisa and Genoa, and in

the dissensions which afterwards dissolved the ill-fated kingdom of Jerusalem, the names of the three maritime republics occupy a prominent place. But it was for the fourth of these great movements that she reserved her greatest efforts. The flower of Western chivalry met at Venice. There might be seen the polished Villehardouin, at once general and historian; the chivalrous Baldwin of Flanders; the ruthless Simon de Montfort, fresh from the murder of the Albigenses. How greatly the power of Venice had increased at this date may be gathered from the terms of the alliance. She was to undertake the transport of the Crusaders "wherever the service of God and Christendom should require,"—herself joining them with fifty galleys. She was to receive for this service a sum of 85,000 crowns, together with the benefit of the significant proviso, that all conquests were to be equally divided between the republic and her allies. It was not, perhaps, contemplated that this was to give to the city of refuge—the home of the outcasts who had fled from the sabres of the Huns—so large a share in the partition of the Roman Empire. It is needless to tell the romantic story so familiar to every historical student. That splendid armament sailed out upon the Adriatic, as one scarcely less brilliant had sailed out upon the Ægean sixteen centuries before, with a favouring wind and a tranquil sea; like it, too, in the magnificence of its equipment and the greatness of its aims, but very unlike it in its complete success. History can never forget how the great city, peaceful and luxurious, occupied by a numerous but degenerate population, and stored with the most precious treasures of art and literature, succumbed before the hardy valour of the Latins. And one picture we catch, amid the din of battle, than which there are few more remarkable in history—that of the Venetian Doge, Henry Dandolo, the brave old man, standing fully armed in his galley, his sightless eyes turned towards the battlements of Constantinople, the sacred banner of St. Mark waving over his head. Nobler still is the disinterested patriotism which, after the taking of the city, led the Doge to reject the dazzling title of Emperor. He was encouraged in his refusal of the offered dignity by the Venetian electors themselves, who felt that its assumption might be fraught with danger to their country's liberty. So strong was their love for her, so far were they from being corrupted by their own peaceful policy, that it never seems to have occurred to them that the prize was one for which it would be well to exchange the dignity of a citizen of Venice. The extent of her power at this time may be gathered from the large share which she took in the partition of the empire. When the one-fourth part had been deducted for the Emperor, she divided the remainder equally with the French barons. Thus it was that the

Doge took the singular title, so characteristic in its quaint accuracy, of "Lord of Three-Eighths of the Roman Empire." Practically, however, her possessions were limited to the Morea, Achaia, the Island of Candia, and a great part of those which compose the Archipelago. Her ambition seems to have been directed to the establishment of a chain of commercial stations along the coast from Ragusa to the Hellespont, an object in which she was partially successful. Subsequently, when the Latin Empire collapsed, and the last Baldwin sailed away in Venetian galleys from his lost capital, the republic still retained the fruits of her former conquest. These acquisitions must have greatly added to her prosperity, not more by the extension of her territory than by the increased facilities which they afforded for her commerce. She was no longer an Italian town, one among many of equal rank and power, but an imperial city, the mistress of distant colonies of immense value. She owes her rise, indeed, to this pitch of power to what (if history ever admitted such) might be termed the lucky accident of the diversion of the fourth Crusade from its legitimate object. She had now a surer claim to greatness than that of her traditionary policy of isolation. Isolated from the rest of Italy she still continued, and that by virtue of these very conquests. While the Lombard and Tuscan cities were wasting their strength in fruitless contests, city after city dashing out its passionate life in fierce internecine struggles or bloody civil dissensions, breaking out into wild inarticulate outcries for liberty, sinking finally into a shameful torpor and silence, she went on treading her solitary path with a calm determination which could only lead to success. It was not, however, only in extending her territories or her commerce that these conquests wrought a change in the fortunes of the republic. For, first, they brought her into collision with her great rival Genoa, and commenced that long struggle which was to be carried on for so many weary years, and with such relentless fury, wherever the hostile fleets encountered each other—far away, under the walls of Constantinople, in the treacherous Euxine, amid the classic islets of the Levant, or in the land-locked channels of Chiozza. And, in the next place, it rendered necessary a modification of her maxims of polity, which, as it was nearly coincident in point of time, and tended towards the same point, with other graver changes which then occurred, was probably one of the causes by which they were brought about. The possessions of the state were granted out to some of her noble families as fiefs to be held in her name, as was the case with the duchy of Naxos, which was given to the Sanuti, with Candia, and others. And whether, as seems probable, the rise of a powerful territorial aristocracy worked a change in the internal policy of the state, or whether

that change proceeded from other more immediate causes, it is certain that very soon after this period it assumes a more distinctly aristocratic character. It was the good fortune of Venice to be freed, by her singular physical position, from that great bane of other Italian cities, the serpent-brood of tyrants, who, safe in their mountain-fastnesses, were always on the watch to tread out, by fraud or violence, the precious liberties of the towns. She had no Eccelino or Gian Galeazzo; she was happily ignorant of Medici and Visconti. She was always more or less aristocratic in tendency; and that events had occurred to quicken and stimulate this feeling is shewn by the memorable movement of 1297. Until that date, the Venice of history is not the Venice with which we are all familiar. When the early government by tribunes had been replaced by that of the Doge, the change was at first to an elective monarchy, deriving its power from the consent of the people. With the increasing power of the state the ducal prerogative seems to have kept pace, the holders of that high office often associating their sons with themselves, and so rendering the honour hereditary for some generations. There appear to have been few precautions against the abuse of power on the part of the Doge,—perhaps, indeed, none, except that last remedy, at all times lamentably and horribly familiar to the Italian mind, from the age of Julius Cæsar to that of Gian Maria, from that of Gian Maria to the very year in which we live. Six out of ten dukes, in the first century after the creation of the office, were either murdered or deposed. In the year 1030 an effort, and a successful one, was made to impose a limit upon their excesses, by obliging them to consult a council of the chief citizens, termed, from the request made for their attendance, the Council of the Pregadi. In 1173, the misfortune of the Doge Michieli led to the establishment of the Grand Council, a body of 480 members, elected annually from the six districts of the city. The council was chosen by tribunes annually replaced, but as the appointment of these electors was left to the people, the government was at first a popular one. Very early, however—as indeed was natural—encroachments were made by the members of this imperial municipality. They assumed the power of rejecting the names which were presented to them as their successors, as well as that of appointing their own constituents. Thus the annual election became practically nugatory,—the Grand Council being always elected from the same families. And in 1297, a century and a quarter after its first establishment, the people having made an attempt to elect a Doge, which was frustrated by the conduct of their nominee Tiepolo, the Grand Council proceeded to elect one of their own number, who was pledged to the support of their interests. This was followed by the formal adoption, as laws, of

practices which had already prevailed as customs; the right of re-election was transferred from the tribunes to the Council of Forty, and such of the actual members as could, upon a ballot, obtain twelve votes out of forty, were to continue to sit. Vacancies, occasioned in whatever way, were filled up by three electors, themselves appointed by the council. By the first year of the fourteenth century an additional step of the last importance had been taken,—the electors were forbidden to insert in their lists the name of any citizen whose ancestors had not sat in the council; and in 1319, after the defeat of a dangerous conspiracy, in which the plebeians coalesced with the excluded patricians, all elective forms were entirely abolished. Noble birth became the sole qualification for government, the famous Council of Ten was created, the aristocracy finally established, and Venice entered upon that mysterious policy which was never afterwards to be changed or modified in the slightest degree, and only fell with herself. Henceforth the power of the Doge and that of the people are utterly annihilated,—the Great Council itself occupies a subordinate position,—it is in the Council of Ten that the real power of the executive is vested.

Holding its common appellation by a strange misnomer, for besides the Ten, properly so-called, it comprised the Doge and his signory; appointed from the council, and entrusted with office for a limited period only, it became, through the necessities of the state, a permanent Dictatorship. Wielding over every citizen of the state an awful and irresponsible authority, its proceedings were wrapped in the most unfathomable mystery. The fearful punishments which it inflicted were as secret as the charges upon which it condemned. Such an institution could hardly lay claim to sympathy,—it has not met, perhaps, even with impartial justice. What is the true estimate of this political enigma, may be asked in another place. At present there is another result of the Venetian conquests to be noticed; a result, perhaps, which can be more directly referred to them, and which affected her fortunes abroad not less than her great political revolution affected her at home. That result is her struggle with Genoa. Until that began, she had never come into collision with a power so like herself in foreign policy, or so nearly her equal in strength. Both were opulent maritime republics; both depended almost entirely upon commerce; both derived that commerce from nearly the same sources, and owed their increasing prosperity to the weakness of Constantinople. In the great revolutions which distracted that empire in the thirteenth century, they took different sides. Under the Latin Emperors, the star of Venice was in the ascendant: that of Genoa rose with the advent of the Palæologi. And though *it was the wise policy* of the Greeks not to disturb the Italian

factories which they found existing on their return, they naturally looked more kindly upon their Genoese allies: they secured to them the preponderance of interest by the concession of many important privileges; such as the establishment of a suburb at Pera, and the grant of trading stations in the Crimea, which gave them the monopoly of the Euxine. Meanwhile the Venetians were chafing under a sense of inferiority, while the Genoese were growing insolent through success. Such a state of affairs could not possibly continue long without an outbreak. Accordingly, many years had not elapsed before the beginning of that long and bloody duel which was to form the leading incident of Venetian history for a hundred and thirty years, fought out, as it was with relentless fury over those very seas which had witnessed the chequered fortunes of Athens and Sparta, or of Carthage and Rome. The first collision was in 1258. Thirty-five years later, the great seven years' war broke out, which for that length of time stained the Mediterranean with blood. Genoa was enabled at this time, by the defeat of her old rival Pisa, to put forth her whole strength; and when, in 1298, the Genoese, under Lamba Doria, met the Venetians, under Andrea Dandolo, at Corcyra, the battle, which ended, as we are told, in the destruction of sixty-six Venetian galleys and the capture of eighteen by the Genoese, together with seven thousand men, seems to have brought about a peace in the succeeding year. But the early part of the next century was occupied by constant hostilities; and by the middle of that period, the insolence of the Genoese—they had captured the whole Greek fleet, and paraded it in triumph before the windows of the Emperor's palace—overcame on his part that well-nigh inexhaustible long-suffering which is the result of conscious weakness. Appealing for aid to the Venetians and Catalans, that struggle was entered upon in which, in the expressive words of Gibbon, the weight of the Roman Empire was scarcely felt in the balance. The great sea-fight of 1352 presents a striking picture. On a wild February evening, the united fleets of Venice and the Catalans, together with the feeble levies of the Empire, encountered the Genoese squadron in the narrow straits of the Bosphorus. One of those sudden storms which have played a mournful part in recent history, swept down from the Euxine at the moment of the onset. As the light of the spring-day faded, the wind rose to a tempest; but in spite of howling wind and roaring sea, the fleets of the hostile republics settled to their deadly work. Night came down upon the waves, the lights came out in the long streets of the great capital, and faded as it sank to rest, but the struggle for dominion was still raging upon the bloody waters. Many of the hostile galleys, dashed against each other by the violence of the storm, foundered in the darkness, or were driven to utter

wreck. When the morning dawned, the shattered remains of the Venetian fleet were far away on the horizon, bearing away for Candia. The victory and the mastery over Constantinople remained with the Genoese,—not, however, for long. The very next year another naval battle, not less bloody than this, was fought off the coast of Sardinia, in which they were signally defeated. So heavy was their loss, that their republic was obliged to surrender herself into the hands of Gian Visconti, the Lord of Milan. She bought efficient aid, indeed, at the ruinous price of the loss of liberty, and under her great captain, Paganino Doria, destroyed the Venetian fleet in the month of November of 1354. In the following year there came a peace, which, after a contest so obstinate and of such weary length, and which bore so heavily on the resources of both states, must have been very welcome. But, despite appearances, Genoa was the chief sufferer. She had already passed the turning-point of her fortunes, and henceforth her history is that of a gradual but sure decadence. She could still, through foreign support, make one vigorous effort, which had well-nigh proved fatal to her rival; but the drain on her resources had been too great to allow her to fight for the future upon equal terms. In Venice, too, the long continuance of maritime warfare was not without its result. The joints of the social fabric were loosened. Among her merchants and seafaring population there had arisen that vague spirit of discontent so dangerous to established institutions. It wanted little to fan this mass of smouldering disaffection into active flame; and that little was found in the senile jealousy of the Doge, Marino Faliero, who was induced to join the malcontents in an attempt to overthrow the aristocracy. Now this coalition of populace and executive was the one especial danger against which the institutions of Venice were directed. Their working may become intelligible from the result. Twenty-four hours after the detection of his guilt, the sole traitor, the only Doge who betrayed the confidence of the Republic, died an ignominious death in his own palace of St. Mark.—One great effort was still to be made by Genoa,—the memorable campaign of Chiozza. Before the year 1379, the hostile fleets had been meeting, always under their hereditary commanders, a Doria and a Pisani, with varied success. At length, in a decisive action before Pola, Vittor Pisani, who had given battle with hastily levied and undisciplined crews, was utterly defeated. Returning to Venice with the remains of his fleet, he was loaded with chains and thrown into prison. Meanwhile the victorious Genoese were riding at anchor before the islands which form a natural breakwater between the Adriatic and the Lagunes. Some time appears to have elapsed before they seem to have become aware of the full extent of their good fortune. Two

months had passed from the date of their success before they attacked Chiozza, the town which commanded the canals which led to Venice; after a siege of ten days it was taken, and Venice lay at the mercy of her old enemy. Her rulers were aware of the danger. They were willing to make concessions which, but for the grave nature of the crisis, might well have appeared humiliating, and which, fortunately, the Genoese, in the insolence of triumph, rejected. Vittor Pisani was drawn forth from his prison, Carlo Zeno was sent to recall the galleys which were scattered about the Levant, the canals were rendered impassable by stockades, the senate in the meanwhile preparing, in case of need, for removal to Candia. And so the winter passed away. With the first day of the new year came Carlo Zeno, bringing with him a powerful fleet. Then, with that almost exact reproduction of some of the most exciting episodes of Athenian history which distinguishes this war, the resolution was taken of blockading the besiegers within the intricacies of the Lagunes. It succeeded to perfection. The whole Genoese fleet was taken as in a trap. At last, when their boats had been burnt, and famine stared them in the face, they surrendered at discretion,—forty-eight galleys and 14,000 men. It was the death-blow of Genoa. Venice, too, was greatly exhausted. By the peace of Turin she lost her Dalmatian possessions to the King of Hungary. This, however, was immaterial, because they were all restored to her on his death in the following year.

Thus closes the story, which, from its romantic colouring, so unlike the more sober hues of ordinary history, might well be termed the "Lay of the War with Genoa." Henceforth the history of Venice enters upon a new and even more eventful era. The conflict which now ended had engaged all her resources for 130 years. Till then she had been scarcely more Italian than the Hanse towns. The petty tyrants of the mainland worked out their schemes of criminal ambition and relentless cruelty down to the borders of the Lagunes. But when her great rival had ceased to be formidable, she had time and opportunity to check the inroads of Carrara of Padua, and to punish him for the part which he had taken in the struggle. This was rendered easy by the state of the peninsula at this time. Milan, under the detestable dynasty of the Visconti, had forgotten her old traditions of freedom. All Lombardy had become subject to her in the successive reigns of Barnabas and Gian Galeazzo. The latter monster, by a combination of subtle intrigue and open violence, had managed to deceive both Carrara and the Venetians, while professing alliance with both. Verona, Vicenza, and Padua fell before him in succession: shortly afterwards he became master of Treviso, the sole fruit to the Venetians of the Florentine

alliance of 1336. Fortune seemed to smile upon all his efforts. The Germans of Bavaria and the French of D'Armagnac found, to their surprise, that they were no longer a match for the consummate strategy of his generals and the discipline of his troops. The indolent Wenceslaus gave the formal sanction of the Empire to the usurpations of the Duke of Milan. The plague swept off the leading citizens of Lucca and Bologna, which thus fell an easy prey. Pisa and Perugia were gained by the old weapons of secret assassination. Florence herself was in imminent danger. Then Gian Galeazzo, stricken with a horrible fear, shut himself up in his castle of Marignano, like a tiger in his den; but the plague reached the miserable, guilty wretch even there, and his death broke up the vast tyranny which had cost him so many crimes. The anarchy which followed upon his death was as great as the stability of his rule during his life; and it was then that Venice went forth from her Lagunes to acquire a wider territory on the *terra firma* of Italy. Her first attack was made upon her old enemy, Carrara of Padua, who, in conjunction with Della Scala, of Verona, had attempted to recover both Verona and Vicenza. Soon after they had taken the former city, Della Scala died: it was supposed that Carrara had poisoned him, and it is certain that he immediately occupied Verona, and arrested the dead man's sons. Then the Venetians had but one foe to contend with. In one year from the commencement of the war, Carrara had been deprived of his whole territory, and after the surrender of Padua, both the tyrant and his sons were conveyed to Venice. There the dark policy of the Council of Ten condemned them to die. They were strangled in prison, on the 16th of January, 1406, and the Republic became mistress of the dominions of Padua, Verona, and Vicenza. Twenty years afterwards, when, under Filippo Maria, the fortunes of the Visconti were again in the ascendant, the two republics of Venice and Florence, the sole remaining champions of liberty, united against the common enemy. Venice was under the government of Francesco Foscari, her most illustrious Doge, while her armies were commanded by the greatest of the great Italian captains, Carmagnola. Under him, her arms were marked at first by one unbroken career of victory. He took from the Duke of Milan the province and city of Brescia; he defeated in succession Sforza, Piccinino, and all the most illustrious commanders in Italy. At last, in 1431, came a reverse. The loss of his cavalry, by a surprise, the destruction of the Venetian fleet, the inaction to which he was consequently reduced, were all unpardonable offences in a foreign adventurer. The sequel is painfully illustrative of the darker side of Venetian character. He entered Venice with all the honours due to the most distinguished suc-

cess; he was led into the senate, and conducted to a place of honour. When he spoke, he was interrupted by the most tumultuous applause. Presently the light of the April evening began to fade. When he could no longer distinguish the surrounding faces, there was a slight stir. It was the sbirri. Hurried away to the prison of the palace, he was put to the torture on the following day. Twenty days afterwards he was led out from his prison, and in the Place of St. Mark, between the two columns, his head was struck from his shoulders in the presence of the awe-stricken people.

From this period until the death of Filippo Maria there is little to record. The Venetian cause appears to have been progressing steadily, and in 1447 the forces of the allied republics pressed so hard upon those of Milan that the tyrant was forced to conclude an alliance with his son-in-law, Sforza. On his death, and the establishment of the short-lived republic which followed, Venice, animated by the ambitious policy of Francesco Foscari, still continued at war with Milan. Upon the accession of the first Sforza to the duchy, her views of conquest were destined to receive a check: an event hastened by the jealousy of Cosmo de Medici, who had succeeded in trampling out the fiery democracy of Florence. The great soldier was everywhere successful. In May, 1448, he took from Venice her conquests on the right of the Adda. In July he burnt her fleet on the Po. In September he captured almost her whole army at Caravaggio. Subsequently, for private ends of his own, he agreed to cede to the Venetians Bergamo, Brescia, Crema, and the Ghiara d'Adda. Of the two latter provinces they were afterwards deprived. But about this time all these minor schemes of ambition were lost in the presence of a common disaster—Europe heard with fear and trembling the great news of the fall of Constantinople. Then a peace was concluded at Lodi, and the third and last part of that great epic "The Greatness of Venice," brought to a close.

This, then, is the period at which the zenith of Venetian power may be fixed. Her greatness, which had begun with Constantinople, was fast declining by the commencement of the sixteenth century. Her resources, with one or two exceptions,—such as the acquisition of Cyprus, by inheritance from the daughter of St. Mark, that of some towns in Apulia, by purchase or intrigue, and the encroachments made upon Romagna, which gave rise to the league of Cambray,—were never afterwards really increased. Another great change was shortly to pass over the face of Europe, and to usher in the modern era; as that of the eleventh century had the brighter half of the era of the middle ages. The established distribution of power was to undergo a remarkable revolution. The Turks threatened Venice in her colonies: the discoveries of the Portuguese mariners were soon to affect her commerce. For the

future she does not acquire—she retains; her attitude is not so much of aggression as of defence. It was at this time, or a little later, that she was most brilliant and splendid, that her arms were gilded with the lustre which not unusually beams upon declining fortunes—that her great painters were beginning to work and triumph—that her commerce was most widely spread, and her polished society endowed with its greatest charms.

For her great commercial activity she was peculiarly adapted by her natural position. Venice was the natural entrepôt for all the products, natural or industrial, which Italy furnished to the less favoured regions of Hungary or Germany. Lying midway between the East and the West, and in the direct path of commerce, she became the natural receptacle of much that northern and western Europe took from the provinces of sunny Spain, from the classic Levant, from the rich plains of the Nile and the Ganges, or from the various trading-stations which were the outlets of central Africa. With the rest of Italy she was connected, for trading purposes, by the different means of communication which existed in the navigable rivers and canals, the privilege of using which seems to have been enjoyed by her almost constantly from the time of the Lombards to that of Filippo Maria.

Historically, her commerce seems to have begun with a few humble manufactures, and then to have received a considerable impetus from a lucrative monopoly of a necessary of life—salt—which she enjoyed. Before the middle of the ninth century she had opened up an important trade with the great commercial city of Alexandria, as indeed is evident from the legend of the removal thence of the body of St. Mark[c]. In the time of the Crusades the navies of Venice and her two rivals, both of whom she was destined to survive, are said to have exceeded in numbers those of the rest of Europe. After the fall of Acre, it was Venice who maintained friendly relations with the Saracen rulers of that great mart, as well as with those of Egypt and Africa; and thus, probably, it was that she secured for herself the greater part of the trade of these countries. Through Egypt she maintained a very profitable intercourse with Asia, and in particular with Hindostan; so much so, indeed, that it was at one time actually proposed to the senate to take the bold step of seizing the country which was the key to so valuable a traffic. With the western nations of Europe, the intercourse of the Italian trading towns was not developed so early. Even when it did arise, in the fourteenth century, it was with Genoa, rather than with Venice, that the English merchants dealt. After the fall of the former republic, Venice must have succeeded to a more consider-

[c] Hazlitt, "History of Venice."

able trade with ourselves[d], and it could not have been entirely insignificant if she concluded a special commercial treaty with London. With Flanders, all the Italian cities, and Venice among the number, maintained a considerable commerce, bringing to her for distribution the most costly Oriental merchandize, and receiving in return the most valuable products of the North. The whole of the European continent was traversed by her merchants; Venetian wares were to be found throughout Germany, and the whole course of the Danube was open to her commerce. With France she was connected by the closest ties, as in the case of the special treaty with Marseilles. Besides her large possessions in the Levant and the Morea, and her stations on the Dardanelles, she held a great part of the eastern coasts of the Mediterranean[e]. She had stations at Tyre and Barytus, Ptolemais and Alexandria. From the commerce of the Saracenic towns of northern Africa, from Tunis, Barca, and Tripoli, the Contarini and other noble families derived an enormous revenue. Her merchants penetrated with equal energy through the arid wastes of Persia and the wilds of Astrakhan. The Venetian sequin was as well known to Indian Rajah, or Persian Shah, or nomad Tartar prince, or savage African chieftain, as it was in Europe, or as the English sovereign is to-day among the same nations, and in the same countries. Few eastern countries had not seen those keen Venetian features, the long caravan—with its motley troop of jesters, its collection of rare or curious animals, to conciliate and amuse languid Rajah or fierce mountain chief—toiling onward with the same unwearied singleness of purpose, and returning finally with its rich load of priceless gems and costly tissues, of ivory and gold-dust, to be borne in the deeply-laden Venetian galleys to the wonderful city at the head of the Adriatic. That her commerce was not altogether the result of a carrying-trade is abundantly clear. Among the Venetian exports to Alexandria at the beginning of the fourteenth century are mentioned timber, brass, tin, lead, oil, saffron, and even woollen cloths. These may possibly not have been native products; but it is certain that the Venetians were cunning workers in the precious metals and in glass. The procession of the trades of Venice on the election of a new Duke is characteristic of a manufacturing city. The Venetian velvets, silks, and mirrors were long highly prized throughout Europe. The Armenians bought her fine cloths. And even

[d] It must have been very considerable. Daru, Livre xix. mentions, among Venetian imports into England, silks, oil, camphor, dried fruits, and thread. They exported from England wool, raw and manufactured.

[e] England did not obtain the privilege of trading under her own flag with Turkey until 1577; the United Provinces not until 1598. Venice had long enjoyed a monopoly.

now, as in the case of the Corso degli Orifici, the names borne by the streets of the city prove that it was once little else than a vast workshop. To foster this commercial spirit was the great aim of Venetian government from the earliest times down to those of her acquisitions on the *terra firma*. At stated intervals, three squadrons were despatched by the state, to Egypt, to Syria, and to the Black Sea, to further the interests of individual merchants. And where the Republic was not sovereign, she established a well-developed consular system, to protect the interests of her citizens, surrounding her officers with all the pomp and circumstance which could add to their dignity. At Constantinople, in particular, the Venetian Podesta boasted of a princely retinue, and a magnificence which made itself felt amid the lavish splendour of that imperial court.

Younger and more vigorous hands have seized upon the commerce which supported the splendour of Venice. But the services which she rendered to art and literature can hardly be forgotten. If she can lay no claim to the invention of printing[f], at least she was one of the first to adopt it. In 1459 the art was pursued at Venice with great success by Nicholas Jansen, and in 1469 a large selection of the classical authors appeared in type. Early in the next century she gave to the world the far-famed Aldine editions. When George of Trebizond translated the "Laws" of Plato, he found valuable support in the cosmopolitan spirit of the Republic. It was at Venice, says Valéry, that statistical science[g] was born,—a statement fully borne out by those valuable state-papers, "The Reports of the Venetian Ambassadors to the Senate." She shares with Pisa and Barcelona the claim which they prefer to the first promulgation of a system of maritime law. It was there that the first newspaper was printed,—*Gazetta* is still a familiar name,—the first bill of exchange issued, and the first bank of deposit founded. Her great library of St. Mark attained a world-wide celebrity; great writers sent copies of their works to it, and men of letters regarded it as the repository of invaluable treasures. Her art-culture speaks for itself. It came a little later, perhaps, than the period of her rising greatness, when the pulses of her national life were beating less fiercely, and when leisure of mind was more common. But not long after the fall of Constantinople, Giovanni Bellini was adorning the ducal palace with his paintings, and laying the foundation of the great cinque-

[f] The following early Venetian editions of classical writers are shewn in the library of the British Museum:—Cicero, *Epistolæ ad Familiares*, by Johannes Spira; the *Ad Brutum* of the same author, by N. Jansen, 1470; a beautiful Aldine Virgil of 1501, and an edition of Tacitus.

[g] Venice recognised very soon the great economical principle of the division of labour. Artizans were confined by special ordinance to one trade. Daru, *Histoire, Livre* 19.

cento school, which, among other great names, was to include those of Giorgione, of Tintoretto, of Sebastiano, of Paolo Veronese, and of Titian. In all were represented the peculiar tendencies of Venetian character—the striving after the sensuous and concrete, rather than after the abstract and theoretical, the perfection of rich and glowing, yet exquisitely tender colouring, rather than the severe and accurate delineation of form. In architecture she had already made considerable progress. Few of us but can recognise the clustering domes, the tall campanile, the gleaming marbles and rich mosaics of that wonderful edifice, so like, in its half-oriental aspect, to the Venetian character—the Church of St. Mark. Fewer still have not looked with admiration upon that marvel of pure Gothic, the Palace of the Doge; the art of the photographer has brought it home to all of us: the long line of cloisters below, where none but a noble might walk; higher up, the covered gallery, whose delicate columns break forth into a wondrous efflorescence of beauty; and above all, the wall of the upper story, somewhat heavy and sombre at first sight, but traced over and relieved with varied arabesque, and lit at intervals with the calm breadth of Gothic windows, and within, the stately chambers where, perhaps, Marino Faliero met the reward of his treason, or where upon the ears of the dying Francesco Foscari, then a disgraced and broken-hearted old man, there fell the measured sound of the bell which was already tolling for his successor.

It must have been a strange spectacle which was presented at this time to a subject of one of the old feudal monarchies of Europe, who, fresh from the comparative squalor of French, or English, or German cities, saw, for the first time, the queen of the Adriatic rising from the waves, the long line of marble palaces, the sumptuous churches, the noble quays of the city, crowded with busy faces—among which were to be seen the dark, proud features of the Moor, the cunning of the Jew, the eagerness of the Italian, the impassive apathy of the German,—the galleys, laden to the water's edge with the most precious merchandize,—all this must have made the first sight of Venice one which could not easily be forgotten. And the unaffected admiration of Philip de Comines[h], himself a courtier of long standing, is the best testimony to her magnificence:—"I was extremely surprised," he says, with his own quaint mixture of utter worldliness and strong religious feeling, "at the situation of this city; to see so many

[h] The following is his testimony to the splendour of the Ducal Palace:—"It is splendid, and rich in all it contains, being built of finely carved marble, and the whole front and facings are of stone gilt an inch thick.... The chapel is the most magnificent piece of building in the universe, being built of mosaic-work in every part...."—History, bk. vii. ch. 18.

churches, monasteries, and houses, and all in the water, and for the people no other passage up and down the streets but in boats. . . . About the city, within less than the compass of half a French league, there are seventy religious houses, all situated in little islands, very beautiful and magnificent both in building and furniture, with fair gardens belonging to them, without reckoning those in the city, where there are the four orders of mendicants, about seventy parishes, besides several fraternities; and, indeed, it is almost incredible to behold so many stately churches in the sea." And in another very instructive passage:—"I was conducted through the longest street, which they call the Grand Canal, so wide that the galleys do frequently cross one another, and I have seen vessels of four hundred tons, or more, ride at anchor just by the houses. It is the fairest and best-built street, I think, in the world, and goes quite through the city: the houses are very large and lofty, and built of stone; the old ones are all painted; those of about a hundred years' standing are faced with white marble from Istria, and inlaid with porphyry and serpentine stone. Within, they have most of them two chambers, at least, with gilt ceilings, rich chimney-pieces, bedsteads of gold colour, their portals of the same, and gloriously furnished. In short, it is the most magnificent city that I have seen, the most respectful to all ambassadors and strangers, governs itself with the greatest wisdom, and serves God with the utmost solemnity; so that, though in other things they may be faulty, I believe God blesses them for the reverence they shew in the service of the Church." What manner of men they were who raised the Republic to such a pitch of power, we may gather from the existing works of her great painters. Some of them have left whole galleries of noble portraits; others, in depicting sacred or classical subjects, have derived their inspiration from Venetian models. To the grave signori and dukes of Titian we have no access. But in our own national collection there are, among others, three pictures in particular which seem to bring us nearer to the men who worked out the greatness of Venice. The first, by Bassano, "The Portrait of a Gentleman," brings out the less fascinating side of Venetian character. The expression of the face is very subtle and astute, but marvellously unscrupulous and insincere. Such a man may have sat as one of the Ten or the Three, or concluded treaties with the Saracens in the name of the Prophet. The "Doge Loredano," of Giovanni Bellini, is equally true. The finely cut features, of almost womanly delicacy, the conscious pride of the erect head, tell plainer than words of the purity of aristocratic lineage. It is a picture very peaceful in tone, very ecclesiastical in character; it might well, indeed, be that of a Roman pontiff, and speaks of a dignity which, like the papal tiara, was only to be attained in a-

vanced years. Yet, in the inscrutable eye, the strong lines of the face, the bland mouth, so firmly set, there lies hid a world of subtle policy, to be carried out with unflinching determination. The celebrated "Family of Darius," of Paul Veronese, is not less significant. One forgets that Hephæstion and Alexander, the daughters of Darius, and the spectators, are clad by a happy anachronism in the rich Venetian costume of the day. The fair faces of the kneeling women, the noble heads and tall sinewy figures of the conqueror and his friend, instinct with manly grace and dignity, might satisfy a somewhat fastidious estimate of aristocratic beauty. They are portraits of the Pisani—descendants of that proud line of admirals who overcame at length the long resistance and sturdy valour of the Geonese.

Her administration was still in the hands of the Council of Ten, or rather of the Three Inquisitors of State—the mysterious *Vehmgericht*[1], which has given its own sombre hue to all the institutions of Venice. When it has been said that, from its first appointment, it resorted to the ignoble weapons of a vague but awful terror and suspicion; that its charges and punishments were alike secret; that the lions' mouths were always open for the malice of the secret informer—it will be thought that enough has been said to prove it to have been a horrible engine of oppression. But every institution which has been allowed to play its part in history has a right to be judged by its practical effects; because we can in no other way estimate it at its true value, when we have no longer any sufficient knowledge of the circumstances under which it took its rise, or of the dangers against which it was meant to provide. And by this test the Venetian government might well be content to be tried. For if it should be shewn that it secured to the people all the practical effects of a temperate liberty; if the ordinary administration of justice was unquestionably pure; if the burden of taxation was light, the finances never corruptly appropriated, but directed for the good of the state with a just economy; if the quiet streets of Venice never echoed to the furious cries of Guelph and Ghibeline; if the wealthiest of aristocracies and the most dangerous of mobs were kept asunder with success; if the power of law was acknowledged to be supreme, when all around was lawless; if there was no constant oscillation between tyranny and anarchy,—then we should certainly have to modify our censure. And those who, from the secure height of England and the nineteenth century, cannot consent to try the institutions of mediæval Venice by any other than a strictly constitutional standard, are bound to shew how far a better form of polity

[1] Daru has a suggestive passage:—"Quand le peuple de Venise parlait de ce redoubtable tribunal il disait en baissant la tête et en levant, le doigt vers le ciel 'ceux d'en haut.'"

than hers was consistent with real liberty in that age and country. Is the true home of Italian freedom to be sought for in the Milan of the Visconti, or in the Rome of those terrible mediæval priests? Is Florence to be our model? Florence, "the most republican of republics," in turbulence only; Florence,—blessed with a popular assembly, whose first act was invariably to vote away its own liberties,—for ever plunged in the most furious excesses of faction, proscribing Guelphs and Ghibelines by turns, torn and bleeding from the incessant feuds of patrician and plebeian houses, equally corrupt and selfish, long hesitating between the *ciompi* and tyranny, sinking finally into those lowest depths of art-culture and the Medici, before Venice had assumed her high place as the "bulwark of Europe?" And are defects so grave and numerous to be atoned for by the presence of a few meaningless constitutional forms? In fact, paradoxical as it may seem, the *ordinary* government of Venice, that which alone came under the notice of the great mass of her citizens, was strictly constitutional[k]. A quiet Venetian citizen might hope to live all his life under the protection of just and equal laws, without once coming into contact with the Inquisitors of State. A Florentine in the same position might reckon with tolerable certainty on suffering during the same period either in person or property. It was only against the ruling classes that the tremendous weapons of the Secret Council were directed; and, however arbitrary and cruel its acts, we may be sure that, from their very mystery, they have been greatly exaggerated. A body of men on whom rested the burden of the foreign and internal administration, could hardly have been always busy with political murders. And the three great charges preferred against it, the deaths of Carrara and Carmagnola, and the treatment of the two Foscari, are very far from being conclusive. Carrara met at Venice with the fate which he would have looked for, as a matter of course, if he had fallen into the hands of any of his brother-tyrants of Lombardy or Tuscany, and which (as he probably did in the case of his ally, Della Scala, of Verona) he would in turn have inflicted upon them under like circumstances without scruple or remorse. Carmagnola was one of the hireling *condottieri* of those times, and might well hope to do at Venice what his brother-soldier Sforza actually did at Milan. The policy of the Foscari[l], which led to the entanglement of Venice in the affairs of Italy, was a direct cause of her ruin. All the crimes of the

[k] It is not a little remarkable that the Doge tells Comines (bk. vii. ch. 19,) not to believe all flying reports, "for that at Venice all people had liberty of saying what they pleased." The publicity, too, given to the state-papers sent by the ambassadors to the senate, is strange.

[l] There can be no doubt that the son had been engaged in a questionable correspondence with Sforza of Milan.

Venetian aristocracy would have been enacted, if we may reason from the analogy of the rest of Italy, in a single year after the accession of the first Doge who had succeeded in overthrowing its power. The real signification of the Council of Ten was perhaps this: an organized ostracism operating in a way which may well excite horror and disgust. But it only shared in the general blackness of the age. For those were bad times. They were bad times of intrigue and violence, of depraved morality and avowed perfidy, which found their expression in the political maxims of Machiavelli. And as time wore on, the consequences of a policy intrinsically vicious made themselves felt. It may be that the nature of the Venetian government hastened her decay; but when it was first adopted it was the only possible safeguard against far worse dangers. The Venetian aristocracy had to make its election between two courses,—that which it actually adopted, and the choice of a short-lived popular government, soon to sink before tyrants as depraved as Nero and as bloody as Robespierre. Posterity may well be grateful for the choice, which gave Europe a bulwark against barbarian invasion. The people *were* grateful. They shed their hearts' blood for St. Mark with the same fervent love, whether it was against King or Pope, Kaiser or Sultan, Italian tyrant or Genoese sea-captain, against the League of Cambray as freely as in Candia or Greece. And the re-appointment of the Council of Ten—for it delivered up its trust every year, and so would have died a natural death—was really the result of a noble self-distrust, and an extraordinary self-sacrifice, on the part of the Venetian nobles. It was against themselves that they were erecting this terrible power; it was to their own ambition that it was destined to be fatal. And, whatever were the faults of the Venetian government, it is impossible to wish that it had never existed. Who can wish that "the few thinly scattered names of illustrious men[m]" had been more numerous, or that the Foscari and the Pisani, the Sanuti and Morosini, had ever risen to the bad eminence of the Medici and the Visconti?

Venetian history is like some tall conical mountain—the traveller who has so long been ascending constantly, finds no level ground or table-land at the summit, but as soon as he has attained the highest point, immediately begins to descend. And so, very soon after the fall of Constantinople, Venice was involved in that long and ruinous struggle with the Ottoman power which forms the most romantic episode of her history. Yielding to overpowering pressure, the Republic in 1454 concluded an alliance with the Sultan, by which her relations to his new empire were

[m] The contemptuous expression is Mr. Hallam's—"Middle Ages," chapter on Italy.

assimilated to those which she had maintained with the Greek emperors. This treaty enabled the Sultan to extend his conquests at pleasure. In successive years he reduced the duchy of Athens, and the little states bordering upon the Euxine, and extended his power over Wallachia and Moldavia. Then, at last, the weary contest began, the vicissitudes of which it were tedious to recount. It was marked, on the whole, by the steady advance of the younger and more vigorous nationality, though not without a resistance from the weaker which is inexpressibly touching. She concludes treaties of alliance with Corvinus and Scanderbeg, the two heroes who broke the first rush of Ottoman invasion; she strives, though vainly, to resuscitate the dead spirit of the Crusades; her sons penetrate with invincible daring through all the wild intermediate country to solicit the aid of the ruling sovereign of Persia. But all was in vain; the tide of fortune had set too strongly against her, and she had nothing to hope from the suicidal policy of Europe. She stood alone in her effort for that which was really the common interest, without aid or sympathy from those whose existence might well have depended upon her success. It was on the old classic ground that the battle was fought out. In 1458 the Turks took Athens, and the last duke was strangled by the order of the Sultan. Eight years later, the banner of St. Mark floated again over the sacred ruins of the Acropolis, though soon to give place to the Crescent; and in 1470 the Turkish fleet put out for the Negropont, and Mahomet II. placed himself on the spot where centuries before another Eastern prince had marshalled his innumerable hosts against the cause of civilization. But liberty had no longer her Leonidas, and the rich province of the Negropont was lost to the republic. Nor is it possible to pass over the heroic defence of the Albanian Scutari: it was worthy of the best times of antiquity. The fierce soldiers of the Crescent shrank back baffled from the walls of the beleaguered city. A similar fate awaited them at Lepanto in the following year. At the same time the Venetians were advancing their interests in Cyprus, as next heirs to the daughter of St. Mark. But in the meantime the danger was pressing nearer home. Italy was destined to experience once more the horrors of barbarian invasion. The Venetian citizens of the peaceful Terra Firma, the inhabitants of Aquileia and Friuli, saw the gleam of the Ottoman sabres, and fell in thousands by the hands of the ruthless conquerors. Many were sold into slavery. And in the face of this great peril Europe was occupied with fruitless contests and jealousies arising from the ambition of her rulers. Then the Republic, deserted and exhausted, concluded, in 1479, a peace with the Sultan, which deprived her of great part of her possessions in Illyria and in the Morea. But in the last

year of the century, the struggle was renewed, the troops of Bajazet II. descending continually from the Albanian mountains upon the rich plains of Dalmatia. The merciless Turkish cavalry, 7,000 sabres strong, crossing the Isonzo, carried murder and rapine to the very borders of the Lagune. And about this time it was that a very significant circumstance occurred,—the invincible Venetian fleet was met and worsted by that of the Turks; and when the war was at last ended, by the good offices of a Venetian captive, it was with the loss of almost all the remaining Venetian possessions in the Morea. It might have been long, perhaps, before the unaided power of the Ottoman race would have borne down the noble resistance of the Republic. But there were other causes which contributed to her decline. The commerce of the East and the West, which had so long pursued the same path, from India to Alexandria, from Alexandria to Venice, from Venice to Flanders and the North, was to take another direction. The discoveries of the Portuguese were to work an extraordinary commercial revolution. One after another they sailed out, those bold mariners, advancing little by little along the coast of that mysterious continent, which has still such unfailing charms for adventurous spirits, until they passed that extreme point which still records their joy and exultation—the Cape of Good Hope. Then brave Vasco de Gama, sailing out into those unknown tropical seas, reached at length the rich Oriental city Calicut, whence the productions of the East passed up the Red Sea into the hands of the Venetian merchants of Alexandria. Then came the long quarrel with the Samorin and the native princes, and the mighty projects of Albuquerque, which culminated in the taking of Ormus and the ruin of Aden, the keys of the Venetian commerce with Persia and India. From this time the commercial supremacy of Venice was gone: the products of the East might be bought far more cheaply at Lisbon; and though, from the natural tendency of trade to continue to flow in the old channels, it was long before these discoveries seriously affected her, yet it must always eventually centre in the cheapest market, and the death-blow of Venetian commerce was struck when Vasco de Gama's galleys cast anchor at Calicut.

Perhaps, again, the Portuguese conquests might never have been made, if an overwhelming danger had not pressed upon the Republic at Rome. But the face of European politics underwent at this time a most extraordinary change. France, relieved from English wars and insolent feudatories, was ready to indulge in visions of foreign conquest; Germany was steadily growing in power. Only the restless ambition of a headstrong youth was wanting in order to let loose upon Italy the horrors of foreign invasion. And when one power had taken the ini-

tiative, there was room for others to follow. The expedition of Charles VIII. was, indeed, the beginning of a miserable period, from which Italy has never recovered. All the glorious fabric of civilization so laboriously reared was dashed to ruin by the selfish and suicidal policy of the rulers of Europe. For many years Italy was like a fair hind torn limb from limb by successive troops of cruel, ravenous wolves. Here, as is so often the case in mediæval history, it was to the temporal power of the papacy that the greatest disasters were due. Too weak to maintain his own cause,—for the arms of the Church were proverbially without edge,—the Pope, alarmed at the advance of Venice upon the province of Romagna, called in to his aid the armies of Maximilian and of Louis. The opportunity was too good to be lost. In 1508, the iniquitous League of Cambray, which was to give cause to such a vast sum of human crime and suffering, was signed by a woman and an ecclesiastic. Thenceforth the work was easy: it was only necessary to promise a division of the spoil to secure the adhesion of the petty tyrants of Italy; and on the 15th of April, 1509, the first step was taken by France. The heroic defence of the Venetian army was neutralized by the evils of a divided command. The forces of Louis soon overran that half of the Venetian territory which was to be his share in the partition. Then came the turn of Maximilian, of the Pope, of Ferdinand of Arragon, and the other inferior potentates. The Emperor, with his mixed army of 100,000 men, was gloriously beaten back from the walls of Padua. In the meantime the open country was the scene of the most frightful atrocities. The unhappy peasantry, robbed, and tortured, and murdered, enjoyed the poor privilege of distinguishing between the brutal, ruffianly debauchery of the Germans, the cool, malignant, passionless ferocity of the Spaniards, and the union of both qualities in the French *écorcheurs*. Every conceivable phase of inhuman atrocity was practised for eight weary years upon the peaceful cities of the Venetian Terra Firma. How the spoilers were divided against each other; how the Catholic King and the most Christian Emperor were ranged in deadly conflict; how conquered Venetian cities, generously released from their allegiance when the state was no longer able to protect them, rose instinctively in the midst of enemies to range themselves once more under the old beloved banner; how, after that terrible Easter-day at Ravenna, the fall of Gaston de Foix gave the final blow to the French power; how the Spaniards, in 1513, committed atrocities which exhaust the whole vocabulary of horror; how they were succeeded by the Germans of the following year; how in 1516 the terrors of the former years were thrown into the shade by new crimes—it is unnecessary to tell. But by the treaty of Noyon the Venetians were once

more put into possession of what they were to have lost by the League of Cambray, but with resources well-nigh exhausted, with territory depopulated by the long continuance of murder and rapine, and with the vitality of their institutions vanished for ever. Nor had they time to recruit their drooping energies. Already the colossal power of the House of Hapsburg was rising in the distance. On the death of Maximilian and the accession of Charles V., the contest between that monarch and Francis deluged Italy with blood, and made the whole history of that unhappy country one monotonous and sickening tale of murder. Milan, Pavia, Naples, Rome herself, all sacked under circumstances infinitely terrible, the whole country abandoned to the brutality of a villainous soldiery, living at free quarters upon the hapless citizens, troops of ruffianly Free Lances sweeping over the land at brief intervals, everywhere fiendish cruelty and rapine, —such was the condition of Italy at the commencement of that sixteenth century which ushered in the establishment of modern society. And Venice suffered with the rest. True, her territory was not apparently much diminished by the final arrangement with Charles V. in 1529. But the era of sovereign cities was past, swallowed up as they were in the larger empires and standing armies of modern Europe. Yet after the final extinction of the whole constellation of contemporary republics, light after light fading away into the black waste of darkness, Venice continued for two centuries and a half an independent city. The brief period of rest which she enjoyed was occupied in an attempt to recover her lost strength, to reduce the enormous debt by which she was oppressed, and to recover, as far as might be, her shattered commerce. But from 1537 to 1540 another war with the Turks broke out, which ended, after three years' incessant strife, in the loss of the islands of the Archipelago, and of the remaining strong places in the Morea. And in 1572 the arms of the second Selim, turned in vain against Persia, were directed more successfully against the Venetian kingdom of Cyprus, acquired a century before, by the death of Catherine Cornaro, the daughter of St. Mark. Venetian story has no incident to record so glorious as the noble defence of Famagosta, or so painful as the fate of Bragadino and his band of heroes. And of the glories of Lepanto, the dauntless sailors who fought before Constantinople, or scattered the squadrons of Genoa, might well have been proud. But it was a dying splendour, a short Indian summer of success—the more beautiful, perhaps, because the long winter of obscurity was at hand. And so the only fruit of Lepanto was to be found in the surrender of Cyprus. Similarly, the seventeenth century contains two wars. That of 1645, which raged for a quarter of a century, resulted, after a fruitless display of the

old heroic spirit, in the increase of the Turkish power. For two years did the Janissaries of Kupruli besiege the last bulwark of Christendom. And, with no other allies than the Pope and the Knights of St. John, Venice bore up against the whole weight of the Ottoman Empire. But in 1669 the inevitable result ensued. After a war of unprecedented fury, Candia was lost to the Republic, and its Grand Council returned into the bosom of that of Venice. In 1682 came the last expiring effort—the last leap of brilliant flame before the final darkness. In concert with the Emperor and John Sobieski, the Republic once more measured herself against her old enemies. It was a brilliant effort. All the Morea, some of the islands, many of her old Dalmatian fortresses, were restored to her by the last year of the seventeenth century, and her possession of the first province secured to her by the peace of Carlswitz. But in 1714 Achmet III. reconquered the Morea without a struggle, and four years later Venice renounced all claim to it under the peace of Passarowitz: after which period the banners of St. Mark can hardly be said to have been raised in active warfare.

She had long, indeed, lost the power of truly independent action: she had long existed mainly through the embarrassments of her adversaries, or because to have molested her would have been to disturb the existing distribution of power. The great struggle had long ago changed its scene: the interest of European politics had been transferred by the movement of the Reformation to another people and country. The atrocities of the League of Cambray had been renewed on a wider stage, and perhaps with more lasting horrors, in that storm of blood which deluged Germany for so many years. The consequent preoccupation of Europe, together with the decline of the House of Austria, and the fact that as the Ottoman power became more settled it became less actively dangerous, may explain the length of the period which elapsed between her death-blow in the wars of the League of Cambray and her final extinction. Her decay was a very gradual one. In 1669 the Republic had still one hundred and twenty-six millions of ducats to expend on her defence against the Turk. In the war of the Succession she might, perhaps, had she been willing, have turned the scale against Austria. She could still exert the full power of her mysterious executive against conspirators such as Jaffier and Jacques Pierre. She could still, whenever opportunity offered, afford a constant and ready, though perhaps not very efficient, support to the cause of religious liberty abroad,—to Henry VIII. against the Holy See,—to the German Protestants in the Thirty Years' War,—to the Protestant Grisons of the Savoy against the Catholics,—to Henry of Navarre against Rome and the League. From the great movements of the first

half of the eighteenth century she studiously kept aloof. With a population still very numerous, and an army and navy of considerable strength, she was unable even to make her neutrality respected. Her last agonies are hardly yet remote enough for history. She fell before that resistless but salutary force which shook down so many effete institutions. And it is a strange and suggestive thought, that within the memory of living statesmen there existed in the bosom of this modern European society an imperial city which could trace back an unbroken line of descent from the dim traditions of Rome.

Further than the natural dislike for the solution of a continuity which had endured so long, the fall of Venice can scarcely be regarded with regret. In this, at any rate, the often overstrained analogy between the state and the individual holds good, that both have a natural term and limit of life, beyond which there is seldom any room for usefulness. And for Venice this period had long ago arrived. What work she was appointed to do had been done; what high message she was charged to proclaim had long ago been delivered. Her commerce and manufactures had long been at their lowest ebb; her army, which had once borne the banners of St. Mark so proudly, had become ineffective; her navy diminished, her debt always increasing, the beautiful unity of her subject-cities broken by the fierceness of faction, her government a selfish oligarchy, becoming narrower every day, and maintaining a perpetual reign of terror by the fearful weapons of the poisoner and the bravo. Her nobles had exchanged that rigid self-denial which had shone so brightly in the earlier times of the Republic, for a shameless rapacity which bore heavily upon her finances. The loss of territory, which reduced them to poverty, at the same time added to their number. The Grand Council of Candia was received back, on the loss of that dependency, into the parent Council of Venice. More than half the members of that council were beggars, living upon the bounty of the few remaining great families, yet retaining suffrages which they sold to the highest bidder. The administration of justice was not exempt from the general laxity. Those pure and spotless tribunals which had been the just pride of ancient Venice, and for which the aristocracy had provided so early after their acquisition of power, had become notoriously venal and corrupt. Nor could the Republic succeed in retaining the affection of her subjects. The growing necessities of the state were supplied by intolerable exactions. Such Eastern Christians as from time to time came under her power, (how strangely unlike the passionate attachment of the cities of the Terra Firma!) looked back with longing to the dominion of the Ottoman. The strong religious feeling of earlier times had been replaced by an unbounded license;

"Venice became the Sybaris of the modern world." Every opportunity for rejoicing was eagerly sought for; hardly a day passed (how strongly are we reminded of the decline of Athens) without some religious or political festival. Every year brought round the debaucheries of the Carnival, when Venetian society was involved in the doubtful pleasures of a protracted masquerade. And all these excesses were the direct work of her rulers. The low cunning peculiar to vicious forms of government had forced them to seek their own safety in the corruption of the people. One turns away instinctively from the Venice of these later times, as from a hideous and revolting picture.

In truth, it was only the exhaustion of decrepitude, the disorder which always precedes the impending dissolution of an effete society. Yet it is apparently from this period of Venetian history that the estimate of Venetian character has been sometimes formed. From a survey, too, of this same period, has arisen the sweeping censure[a] which has been not unfrequently passed upon the institutions of Venice, and the entire want of sympathy which they have had to encounter. In reality, they are as far removed from the indiscriminate censure of this century, as they are from the indiscriminate admiration of former times. Neither, in fact, is it at all applicable to them. Judged, indeed, on the broad rules of moral right, they are utterly without excuse. But as these principles are of universal application, and command immediate assent when proposed, it was perhaps scarcely necessary to insist upon them so strongly as has been done by some. Few persons, probably, are in danger of falling into the grave error of supposing that a secret and irresponsible government, working through an apparatus of terror and suspicion, is in itself a desirable form of rule. On the other hand, many more are likely to be misled into supposing the government of Venice to have been far more faulty, and far less justified by circumstances, than it really was; or into asserting the dangerous principle that a vicious form of government may be attended for centuries with the best results to the national welfare and happiness, and may receive, through all vicissitudes of fortune, the enthusiastic attachment of its citizens. If Venice, with a confessedly vicious and criminal polity, was the happiest, the most tranquil, and the most prosperous of Italian states, it was because she was purer and better than her neighbours; as much so, indeed, as the times would allow. And this would be readily acknowledged if it were a less general practice to weigh historical institutions with a constant side-glance at our own maxims of polity. If there be one thing which history is not, it is a kind of political pharma-

[a] See Sismondi, Daru, Brougham, (Political Philosophy,) Hallam, and many other writers of liberal tendencies.

copæia, fruitful in valuable specifics ready for immediate application. This is a function which it never can possibly perform. Every age has its own peculiar trials and difficulties, and its own method of dealing with them. No conclusion, therefore, of any real value, can be drawn with respect to institutions of another age and country, from their conformity with, or difference from, those which are best adapted for us. The marvellous success of the Venetian policy is the best proof of its having been necessary, and offers a strong presumption that it has been too severely censured, and not really appreciated or understood. The obvious moral to be drawn from the fate of Venetian institutions is to be gathered from the spectacle of the narrow, cunning, selfish, murderous oligarchy into which the wise aristocracy of earlier times necessarily developed itself, and with which it has been so generally confounded.

No history, perhaps, can boast of such a continuously romantic colouring as that of Venice. It is one long poem. It is never dull or prosaic. Epos succeeds epos, one lay follows another, from the dim traditions of Attila down to the coming of Napoleon. Few stories are so regularly deductive; in none do events follow causes in such a rigid chain of sequence. In none, perhaps, is the progressive action of the historical drama more uninterrupted: the rise, though gradual, so unbroken, the culminating point so well defined, the fall, when once begun, so hopeless. Two threads are woven into the chequered web of Venetian story, the one bright and shining, the other dark and sombre. Both are always present, and always inseparable; and it may be that to our conceptions of Venice, the darker shade is as essential as the lighter. But it is better to dwell upon the more pleasing side of the picture; to look upon the Republic as the meeting-place of princes, as the not unfrequent refuge of the fugitive and the exile, the one peaceful, inviolate spot in mediæval Europe, untrodden by the foot of hostile soldiery. It is better to look upon her as the bulwark of Christendom, the first and most stedfast advocate of religious liberty; appointing her own spiritual rulers in the days of Gregory and Innocent, with only the form of confirmation from the Holy See; defying the terrible weapons of interdict and excommunication, holding out a succouring hand to the Protestants of Europe throughout the evil days of their earlier history; allowing the free exercise of their religion to heretical Greek and persecuted Jew. To all she must be associated with visions of almost romantic patriotism; with the blind Dandolo before the walls of Constantinople; with Vittor Pisani coming forth from his prison, and bidding the shouting populace reserve their enthusiasm for St. Mark; with the conquered cities of the mainland returning to their allegiance in the

wars of the League of Cambray, when beset on all sides by enemies; with the younger Foscari, driven back by an irrepressible longing to lay his tortured limbs once more in Venice. To all she must be associated with an almost fabulous magnificence; with the glories of St. Mark or the Ducal Palace; with the bronze horses of Lysippus; with the jewel-paved Hall of Ambassadors, which struck with confusion the haughty envoys of Genoa; with the splendid symbolism of the marriage of the Adriatic; with many a vision of pomp and pageant, of high-born dames, and grave, courtly, polished gentlemen, of the charm of modern society amid the rugged feudalism of the middle ages. To all, besides the absolute heroism of her perpetual wars, she must suggest bright reminiscences of individual energy and adventure—Contarini forces his dauntless way to the deserts of Persia; the brothers Zeno sail out into Arctic seas, amid the icebergs of Greenland; brave Marco Polo, at once the Herodotus of modern history and the Ulysses of modern adventure, wanders out into unknown countries, to become a Chinese viceroy, and to return, after seventeen years, laden with priceless treasures, to the old house in the Corte del Millioni. To poetry, Venice has long been a household word, and an unfailing theme. To art she has given the unrivalled glories of her great colourists, and is beautiful alike when steeped in the luminous atmosphere of our own Turner, or standing out clear and distinct in all the sharply defined photographic minuteness of Canaletto's loving pencil. It may possibly be a valuable mental condition, it is certainly an unhappy one, which can see in history only the darker side of the picture, which is always passing over its own Bridge of Sighs, to dwell upon the horrors of the dungeons which lie beyond.

Perhaps, indeed, it is only at Venice that the full charm of her story is to be felt. There, gliding noiselessly in the mysterious gondola between the long lines of silent palaces, sombre and desolate, on whose walls, dank with sea-rime and discoloured by the long process of the years, the yellow sea-weed stirs lazily to the plash of the oar; anon, by the stately churches, on whose clustering pinnacles, far above in the clear air, the sculptured saints and angels are bathed in the full light of heaven, or stand out calm and solemn against the darkening sky; and then out to the still busy life of the Grand Canal, echoing with the cries of the gondolieri; while from the classic Piazza di San Marco, crowded still with its motley throng of all nations, and tongues, and costumes, as it was when the European capitals of to-day were little more than collections of unsightly hovels, there comes in the sweet strains of the military band, softer over the surface of the waters, the glorious music of Italy, jubilant with martial ardour or plaintive with hopeless passion—all the scenes of the

old glorious traditions grouped together in their own vivid loveliness, it may not be unnatural to wish that the greatness of ancient Venice may once more return. Such a wish is, however, impossible upon calmer reflection. The course of history must be viewed with the eyes of the optimist, else would it be indeed a cruel mockery. In the great struggle which it records, the victory always remains with the worthier combatant,—the vanquished never goes down before an unmerited fate. Nations, ideas, institutions have their appointed term of power, and die out as irretrievably as the mastodon. Whatever history may teach of the indestructibility of national types, she has nothing to tell us as to the permanence of their dominion, or its recovery when lost. It is not by worn-out and incapable instruments that the great scheme of civilization is to be carried out. The task is one for younger and more vigorous hands. And whenever there is a work to be done, the Great Disposer provides those who shall do it. To wish for the restoration of ancient types is only to desire to interrupt the progress of the great drama of civilization,—awful story, of which the acts are ages, and the players nations,—and thus to will the ruin and stagnation of society. So we may come to be reconciled to the spectacle of an insolent Austrian soldiery installed in the inviolable precincts of St. Mark. Venice had done her work, and had proclaimed her message; she was not cut down until she cumbered the ground. For if theories of progress are not to be disposed of by a sneer; if, as surely they must, if there be any providential government of the world, they have in them something of depth and reality, something of an earnest hope which may be vague, yet which shall not be altogether disappointed, then not only must there have been something of good in all historical institutions, but all change must on the whole be for the best: it is truth struggling out like the chrysalis from lower forms of being, it is the great scheme developing itself in its parts,—only thus by rising step by step from old things to new, one nation after another, panting and exhausted, handing on the sacred torch through all the long course of time, shall the one increasing purpose of Omniscience be fulfilled.



ERRATA.

Page 4, in Analysis, *for* 1632, *read* 1682.
—— 3, *line* 7, *omit* they.
—— 25, *line* 7 *from bottom*, *for* at Rome, *read* at home.

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